

SPORTS

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Blooming Prairie's Luke Larkoski is lifted up by coach Matt Kittelson after a stop against BOLD in the Class A Prep Bowl last year at US Bank Stadium. Herald file photos

The uncertainty of fall

Area athletes are trying to stay calm amidst season delays

By Rocky Hulne/sports@austindailyherald.com

In a normal Minnesota fall sports season, area football teams would be under the lights this Friday night and area volleyball teams would be on the court already. But the COVID-19 pandemic has made this a highly unusual year and some athletes are picking up new sports, some are staying patient, and almost all are feeling confused.

Hayfield senior Maryx Young was frustrated when she missed out on track and field last spring, but when volleyball and football seasons were moved from the fall to the spring to start this school year, Young, like many other high school athletes, has found herself anxious and nervous.

Young has hopes of playing college volleyball and having her season moved will make it difficult to get her recruiting process going. She is also bummed out at the thought of missing out on homecoming and football games, which are as traditional as the falling leaves when autumn arrives in Minnesota.

"Stuff doesn't always work out, but we're hoping to have a full season in the spring," Young said. "It's kind of tough for our seniors not to have football, volleyball or homecoming. It's probably going to be the most boring fall season known to man in Minnesota."

Young has begun emailing college coaches, but she'll have to rely on highlights and stats from her junior year with the Vikings, where she posted 590 set assists and 306 digs. She's also staying active by working out, but it's been a difficult process for Young to be away from competition for nearly a year.

"It's terrible. I'm a very competitive person and once we hit that season it's go time. It's very tough for me to not be competing," Young said. "We're so used to volleyball and we don't really know what to do with ourselves now that we won't have it. This year is crucial for anybody that wants to get noticed and recognized. I really hope we can play (in the spring) to have more highlights and show college coaches what we're made of. This season could really make or break that."

Blooming Prairie senior Luke Larkoski was on the bench last fall when he helped the Awesome Blossoms capture their first ever state football title, but he's been doing something he never could have imagined this fall.

Larkoski is one of four BP football players and 11 volleyball players who have decided to run cross country this year as they look to stay in shape for their main sports.

"I was doing our speed and agility camp for a couple of months, but that stopped," Larkoski said.

"We're so used to volleyball and we don't really know what to with ourselves now that we don't have it."

Maryx Young
Hayfield senior

"Cross country has been a little different, but I'm learning that I'm a better runner than I thought I was."

Larkoski is a hard nosed defensive player when he puts on pads for the Awesome Blossoms, but he'll have to settle for running without contact for the immediate future. He said the football team does have three weeks of fall practice scheduled, but he isn't sure if he'll be able to wear pads for those sessions.

"I'm a football player and I love football and it was kind of sad that we couldn't have it this fall," Larkoski said. "It's a little upsetting. Your whole summer you think about football and then when July and August come you're getting ready for it. When you win a state championship you want to defend it and it kind of sucks that we couldn't do that this fall."

Pacelli senior Zach Bollingberg is an all-around athlete who can put up 20 points on a given night in basketball, pitch a shutout in baseball, or rack up 100 yards receiving and a pair of touchdowns in football, but this fall will be the longest stretch he's had without a competition in a long time.

Bollingberg spent his summer staying active for the Austin 18U baseball team and he also stayed busy with the Lyle-Pacelli basketball and volleyball teams. He was hoping he



Hayfield's Maryx Young controls the ball for the Vikings against Rochester Lourdes last season.



Lyle-Pacelli's Zach Bollingberg drives through a tackle on a carry in the first half against Houston at Art Hass Stadium last fall.

Online

For more on the Minnesota State High School League's plan for fall and spring, visit: www.austindailyherald.com/2020/08/mshsl-will-allow-fall-sports-but-volleyball-and-football-moved-to-spring/

could play football this fall, after LP snapped a 32-game losing streak last year.

"We were really looking forward to playing, especially coming off of last year where we were in games," Bollingberg said. "We really thought we could have a pretty good season and compete with most of the teams in our conference."

Bollingberg is going to spend his fall staying in

shape and hoping that the Athletics can play basketball this winter as they have a senior-heavy team that could be a contender in Section 1A.

For now, he'll just have to wait and see what happens.

"It's going to be pretty weird not having a sport and not being around friends. I've always looked forward to that and it's given me something to do after school. It's something I love," Bollingberg said. "It's the start of our senior year and it's going to be a lot different. It'll build up at the end of the year when we have all the sports jammed in and we won't have time to do anything else."

Black and gold reunion



Austin Bruins head coach Steve Howard, right, and new assistant coach Justin Fisher stand near center ice at Riverside Arena Monday afternoon. The duo will get a good look at it's players this Friday during the Black and Gold game. Eric Johnson/photodesk@austindailyherald.com

Bruins head coach welcomes former player as an assistant coach

By Rocky Hulne
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Austin Bruins head coach Steve Howard is bringing a little piece of home with him as he looks to lead the Bruins in his fourth year as head coach of the team.

Howard recently brought another slice of Michigan to the Bruins when he brought in Justin Fisher, who is one of his former players, as an assistant coach. Fisher entered Howard's circle through a simple twist of fate seven years ago.

Howard was a new head coach of the NA3HL Flint Junior Generals when his friend and current Bruins scout Jon Jepson, who was the GM of the Junior Generals, brought Fisher into the picture. Fisher was a relative of Jepson who had been playing hockey out East, but a major knee injury left him in a situation where he decided to stay home and play for the Junior Generals.

"I was enjoying my time out east and being away from home, but I talked to Jepson and coach Howard and I kind of came to the agreement of staying there," Fisher said. "I enjoyed my time under Howard and I learned a lot. He threw me on the ice a lot, which is always nice for a player."

Howard said that Fisher wasn't even on his radar until Jepson told Howard that Fisher would be a captain for him. Jepson's prediction was right as Fisher was co-captain for a team that lost just four regular season games, while advancing to USA Hockey's Tier II National Junior Tournament in 2014.

"It worked out really well for me, because I didn't know who he was," Howard said of getting Fisher on the team. "We basically stole him and talked him into staying

at home. That season was a good ride with a lot of good players. I still keep in contact with a lot of them. That's how Fish got here."

Howard was named NA3HL coach of the year in 2014 and Fisher, who had 50 points in 48 games with the Junior Generals, went on to compile 134 total points in 161 games in five years at ACHA Division I Adrian College before serving as an assistant coach for one year at Adrian.

Howard is now asking Fisher to step up as a leader off the ice as the Bruins look towards the upcoming season.

"He was a coachable kid who did things the right way," Howard said of Fisher. "Being a coach here is new to him and he's going to be thrown right in the fire. He's going to burn himself here or there, but that's just what quality assistants do. He's going to get a feel for how we do things here and establishing that winning culture that we want to have."

The Bruins are bringing about 40 players to Austin this week for team building camp and it will feature two scrimmages. The first game is at 7:05 p.m. Friday and the second game is at 7:05 p.m. Saturday. Both games will be held in Riverside Arena. Tickets are available, with a limit of 250 fans.

While all of the new Bruins will be getting accustomed to Austin, Fisher will also be adjusting to his new home.

"At Adrian College, it's a small hockey town and once I stepped in at Austin it was very similar and it's a great feel," Fisher said. "I'm still learning a lot about our returning players and our new players. It's a big learning curve for me, but I'm excited to get to it."



Austin Bruins Black and Gold Games
When: 7:05 p.m., Sept. 4-5
Where: Riverside Arena.
Tickets: \$10, call 507-434-4978.

Note: Tickets will be limited to 250 fans per night, masks will be required and social distancing will be enforced.

Darren Dash is set for Oct. 3

Austin Daily Herald
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The ninth annual Darren Dash will be held at 10 a.m. on Oct. 3.

There will be no half marathon this year, but there will be a 5K race with a limit of 150 participants.

The race will start at and finish by Veteran's Pavilion.

Darren Lewis was an Austin native and running enthusiast who was the youngest Minnesotan to run Grandma's Marathon at age nine. He eventually ran for the Mankato State

University cross country team.

All proceeds will go to scholarships for Austin and Pacelli senior cross country runners.

Any sponsors interested in helping with the event can email Scott Lewis at slewistherapy@aol.com

To register for Darren Dash, go to www.active.com/austin-mn/running/9th-annual-darren-dash-2020.

Any sponsors interested in helping with the event can email Scott Lewis at slewistherapy@aol.com



Austin's Reana Schmitt reaches on a backhand attempt in a No. 1 singles match against Faribault Friday. Photos by Rocky Hulne/sports@austindailyherald.com

Packers double up their win total as doubles teams stay unbeaten

By Rocky Hulne
sports@austindailyherald.com

Austin head girls tennis coach Jeff Anderson heard a question he's probably never been asked before when he was speaking to his team after the Packers beat Faribault 6-1 in Paulson Courts Friday.

After declaring the Packers are now 2-0 overall, one of the players asked him "does that mean we're first in the Big Nine?" Anderson smiled with his team and said. "we're 2-0, so yes it does."

The Packers (2-0 overall, 2-0 Big Nine) have now matched last season's win total and the team's two-year winless streak is now a distant memory for a group of players who are getting more and more sure of themselves each time they take the court.

Austin's doubles teams swept all three matches for the second straight day and the No. 1 team of Madison Hogan and Lauren Wernimont showed their

resilience as they beat Rylie Starkson and Sarah McColley 6-2, 6-4.

"It feels really good to be 2-0," Wernimont said. "The more we win, the more confident we get. We know that we play well together."

Hogan said she was surprised by the size of the crowd that the Packers drew in their first home match, but she didn't let it distract her. She stayed on the same page with Wernimont throughout the win.

"It's been communication that has helped us. Even if you hit a ball out or hit it into the net, you need to brush it off," Hogan said. "It happens, but you support your partner, have fun and if you win the match too, that's great."

All six of Austin's wins were sweeps and no. 1 singles player nearly pulled a comeback off to give the Packers a sweep of the match. Schmitt was beaten 6-1 in the first set against Kyle Patrick, but she ral-



Lauren Wernimont makes a play on the ball in Austin's No. 1 doubles match.

lied back to win the second set 6-2, before falling 10-7 in the tiebreaker.

- Austin 6, Faribault 1 Singles**
 No. 1 Kylie Petricka (F) def. Reana Schmitt (A) 6-1, 2-6, 10-7
 No. 2 Chloe Schmitt (A) def. Stacie Petricka (F) 6-1, 6-3
 No. 3 Gracie Schmitt (A) def. Lindsay Ravenhorst (F) 6-0, 6-0

No. 4 Kaitlin Meiergerd (A) def. Neil Gibbs (F) 6-1, 6-0

- Doubles**
 No. 1 Madison Hogan and Lauren Wernimont (A) def. Rylie Starkson and Sarah McColley 6-2, 6-4
 No. 2 Siri Ansoorge and Sam Krueger (A) def. Hailey Revvers and Ashley Rost (F) 6-2, 6-3
 No. 3 (A) Natalie Haynes and Jordyn Moriarty (A) def. Bailey Peterson and Avery Rein 6-3, 7-5

Coming up for air

We are one week into the fall sports season and so far things have been pretty good for area athletes.



The Austin girls tennis team started off by winning their first two matches of the season for the first time in as long as I can remember and the Packer girls swimming and diving team was able to host its first ever "virtual" meet at Bud Higgins Pool.

While no fans were allowed at the swim meet, the tennis team drew a pretty sizable crowd on a Friday afternoon and the spirits were high for all who were involved.

Getting back to competing, in any way shape or form, will serve as a much needed mental boost for all of the athletes who have been stuck in pause for the last five months. I can't stress enough how much physical activity can break the cloud of

boredom for youngsters while also providing an outlet.

This generation has seen plenty of adversity and it's nice for them to get a chance to take a deep breath, go out and forget their troubles for a couple of hours while competing in a sport they love.

As we begin the school year, I'm hopeful that everyone can do their part to keep the season and in-class learning going as long as possible.

Much like a sporting event, everyone will have to do their part. Wear a mask in public, avoid large crowds, and give everyone their space, because we all need a little time to breathe.

Blooming CC off and running in 2020

Austin Daily Herald
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The Blooming Prairie took third and the BP girls finished fourth at the Tiger Trail Run cross country meet in Medford Friday.

BP head coach John Bruns said the race was a good start for all of the new Awesome Blossoms — including basketball standout Megan Oswald, who took third in the girls race to lead BP.

"For quite a few of the runners it was their first 5K race ever, so that was a good mental hurdle to

get over," Bruns said. "Times were not super fast as the course was wet and tough, but I thought everyone did very well considering how early in the season we are."

BOYS RESULTS

1. Medford 24; 2. Maple River, 42; 3. Blooming Prairie 60
 BP: Hosea Baker (eighth, 20:56); Alex Miller (11th, 22:12); Jesse Cardenas (12th, 22:20); Luke Larkoski (13th, 22:21); Dylan Johnson (16th, 22:56); Ty Forystek (17th, 23:02)

GIRLS RESULTS

1. Maple River 23; Blooming Prairie 33; Medford, INC
 BP: Megan Oswald (third, 27:51); Emily Miller (sixth, 28:36); Chloe McCarthy (eighth, 29:16); Abby Smith (ninth, 29:19); Maggie Bruns (12th, 30:12); Asha Lighthizer (14th, 30:33)

Jags 'feel good' about compensation from Vikings for Yannick Ngakoue

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — The Jacksonville Jaguars never got the first-round draft pick they sought for Yannick Ngakoue.

Still, the Minnesota Vikings didn't acquire a young, productive pass rusher without some sacrifice.

Jacksonville dealt Ngakoue to Minnesota on Sunday for a second-round

draft pick in 2021 and a conditional fifth-rounder in 2022, a trade that was formally executed with the league on Monday.

Jaguars coach Doug Marrone said the team "feels good" with the compensation they received in return for a 25-year-old defensive end with 37 1/2 sacks and 14 forced fumbles in four seasons.

"When you're a coach and you're sitting there, it's almost like you feel like you're in the middle," Marrone said. "You want what's best for the player. You want what's best for the team. In this situation — I haven't spoken to Yann — but obviously if he's happy, then I'm happy for him."

Ngakoue agreed to rework his 2020 salary to get out of Jacksonville, according to a person familiar with the trade. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

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SCHEDULE

Wednesday
No events scheduled

Thursday
Boys soccer: Red Wing at Austin, 7 p.m.
Girls soccer: Austin at Red Wing, 7 p.m.
Girls swimming and diving: Mankato West at Austin, 6 p.m.
Girls tennis: Austin at Owatonna, 4:30 p.m.
Cross country: Hayfield Invite, 4:30 p.m.

Friday
No events scheduled

Saturday
No events scheduled

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